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## **From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Theology Part I: Historical Review**

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### **1. Introduction**

After making a presentation to a group of Adventist professors teaching in universities around the world, I opened the floor for questions. A soft-spoken scholar reacted to my presentation by affirming, “If things are as you argued, we do not belong to the same church.” I did not know what to say. I had been caught off guard. Even though I did not know the members of the group personally, I knew all of them were Adventist believers teaching in Adventist educational institutions. How could another Adventist colleague come to such a shocking conclusion? After all, I had just made a standard Adventist presentation to a group of fellow believers. After a moment’s hesitation, I ventured to ask: “What do you teach?” The group burst into laughter. When the laughter subsided, I was brought up to speed. My interlocutor was a theology professor. At the time, I dismissed the incident as an overstatement. However, with the passing of time, I came to realize that my colleague was right. Though members of the same denomination and teaching for the same educational system, we did not belong to the same church. Can a house divided against itself stand? (Mark 3:25).

Adventism has grown and developed in a very uneven way. I used to believe that all Adventist administrators, pastors, and teachers around the world understood Adventist theology and mission in the same way. More than twenty years at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary have taught me that Adventists have grown apart in the way they understand themselves, do theology, engage in mission, and even worship God. What keeps us together is our solid worldwide administration. Once we were a movement; now we are an institution. The movement originated, developed, and grew because of its uncompromising biblical theology and self-understanding. As the movement became

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institutionalized, Adventism's biblical theology and self-understanding slowly but surely were displaced from their original grounding role. A subtle detheologization of the Adventist mind and experience has taken place. A progressive forgetfulness of Adventist theology has motivated some inquiring minds to find their self-understanding in the world of Protestant theology. While this process was taking place in some sectors of the church in America, Europe, and Australia, other sectors continued to understand Adventism from Scripture and Ellen White. Theological unity was replaced by theological diversity.

As a seminary professor, I experience this diversity first hand from my own students. They bring to the seminary ideas taught to them by their pastors and teachers around the world. Moreover, during the last twenty years, Adventist publications, not only at the scholarly but also at the popular level, have disseminated theological diversity. Many view theological diversity as a sign of growth and vitality. However, careful study of the theological ideas circulating in Adventism at the beginning of the twenty-first century shows the existence of incompatible theological systems competing for the Adventist mind.<sup>1</sup> Can a house divided against itself stand? (Mark 3:25).

The purpose of this four article series is to help readers understand the present theological landscape (first article); adumbrate ways to overcome divisive differences in theology that conspire against the unity of the Adventist Church and slow its global mission (second and third articles); and consider the way theological ideas impact the ministry and mission of the church (fourth article).

To accomplish the first goal, we will consider in this article the theological process that brought us to the present situation. In 1893, Ellen White wrote, "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history."<sup>2</sup> Have we forgotten? What is

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<sup>1</sup>During the last ten years the existence of theological problems in Adventism has been addressed in various ways: for instance, by Jack W. Provonsa, *A Remnant in Crisis* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1993); William G. Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism: Ten Issues Threatening the Church Today: Why the Next Five Years are Crucial* (Boise: Pacific, 1995); Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Receiving the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle* (Berrien Springs: Berean, 1996); George Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 160–197.

<sup>2</sup>"The work is soon to close. The members of the church militant who have proved faithful will become the church triumphant. In reviewing our past history, having travelled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as Leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history. We are now a strong people, if we will put our trust in the Lord; for we are handling the mighty truths of the word of God. We have everything to be thankful for. If we walk in the light as it shines upon us from the living oracles of God, we shall have large responsibilities, corresponding to the great light given us of God. We have many duties to perform, because we have been made the depositories of sacred truth to be given to the world in all its beauty and glory. We are debtors to God to use every advantage he has entrusted to us to beautify the truth of holiness of character, and to send the message of

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there to remember? To answer these questions I will analyze the methodological, hermeneutical, and systematic structure of early Adventist theology. “Remembering” will help us perceive the slow “forgetting” that eventually led to a surprising “replacing” and a welcomed “reaffirming” that extended to significant and different sectors of church leadership and membership.

In the second article, we will consider whether “remembering” may motivate us to “retrieve” the methodological, hermeneutical, and systematic structure that called Adventism into existence. Finally, we shall consider how the “retrieving” may guide us in our “doing” theology and finishing the mission of the Church in our postmodern times.

### 2. Remembering

How did Adventist theology begin? We may answer this question by simply saying that Adventism began by studying biblical prophecy, notably the books of Daniel and Revelation. Though true, this response is limited because it does not tell the whole story. To notice that Adventist Theology began as Eschatological Theology does not explain its genius nor the pioneers’ reason for separating from all other existent churches and theologies to form a new worldwide community which they believed to be the remnant true Church of God in the last days before Christ’s second coming.<sup>3</sup>

To visualize the genius implicit in early Adventist Eschatological Theology, we need to reflect on the methodological ground on which it was constructed. Specifically, we need to consider the ground and the vision from which the system of Christian theology was understood by early Adventist theologians.

**The Ground.** For a good number of us, the most important feature of Adventist theology, the one aspect that charters its uniqueness and destiny, passes generally unnoticed in everyday Adventist circles. I am referring to the “*sola Scriptura*” principle on which it builds.<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White repeated this principle

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warning, and of comfort, of hope and love, to those who are in the darkness of error and sin” (Ellen White, “General Conference Daily Bulletin” [January 29], 1893, par. 5).

<sup>3</sup>“The Protestant churches of the Reformation era may be considered God’s faithful remnant after more than a millennium of papal apostasy. SDAs hold that various Protestant groups served as Heaven’s appointed harbingers of truth, point by point restoring the gospel to its pristine purity, but that one by one these groups became satisfied with their partial concept of truth and failed to advance as light from God’s Word increased, and with each refusal to advance, God raised up another chosen instrument to proclaim His truth to earth’s inhabitants. Finally, with the arrival of “the time of the end” . . . God called another “remnant,” the one designated in Rev. 12:17 as the remnant of the long and worthy line of heroes of the faith.” (Don F. Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2d. rev. ed. [Washington: Review and Herald, 1966], sv., Remnant).

<sup>4</sup>SDA Fundamental Belief #1: “The Holy Scriptures: The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and

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often. She praised Luther for applying this principle<sup>5</sup> that she identified as the “Protestant Principle.”<sup>6</sup> At the end of time, she assured us, “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.”<sup>7</sup>

Since Adventists received the ground on which they built their theology from Protestantism, the question arises as to *the difference* that exists between Protestant and Adventist theologies. If both built on the same ground, why did early Adventist believers feel the need to leave all Protestant denominations behind and form a new one? Because studies of our roots mainly focus on continuities with Protestant tradition, they do not help much to explain the differences between Seventh-day Adventist and Protestant theologies.<sup>8</sup> The question about the uniqueness of Adventist theology takes us, then, to consider the fields of theological methodology and hermeneutics. If the difference between Adventist and Protestant theologies cannot be explained in relation to the source of theology, it might become apparent if we consider the method and hermeneutical principles each tradition used in building their theological views.<sup>9</sup>

Addressing this question ten years ago, Adventist historian C. Mervyn Maxwell correctly identified four basic characteristics of the hermeneutics and method on which early Adventist theology was constructed.<sup>10</sup> Three of them, as we will see, are intensifications of methodological principles received from Protestant Theology. The fourth is the macro hermeneutical vision from which Adventist theology came to existence. Let us consider each one briefly.

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the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (2 Peter 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 4:12.)”

<sup>5</sup>See, for instance, *The Great Controversy*, 132.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 595.

<sup>8</sup>See, for instance, Gerhard Hasel, “The Anabaptists of the Sixteenth Century and their Relationship to the Sabbath” (M.A. Thesis, Andrews University, 1960); Peter van Bemmelen, “The Reformation Roots of Adventism” (Philadelphia: Paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Adventist Society of Religious Studies*, 1995); Woodrow Whidden, “Adventist Theology: The Wesleyan Connection” (Philadelphia: Paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Adventist Society of Religious Studies*, 1995); Charles Scriven, “The Radical Vision and the Renewal of the Church” (Philadelphia: Paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Adventist Society of Religious Studies*, 1995); Smuts van Rooyen, “The Reformation Roots of Adventism: A Personal View” (Philadelphia: Paper presented at the *Annual Meeting of the Adventist Society of Religious Studies*, 1995). George Knight sums it up by saying that “While it is true that Adventism’s concept of salvation by grace through faith came through the mainline Reformers, the theological orientation of Adventism really finds itself most at home with what church historians call the Radical Reformation or the Anabaptists” (*A Search for Identity*, 30).

<sup>9</sup>The difference between Roman Catholic and Adventist theologies is easily explainable when we take into account the sources from which each builds its theology and practice. Since Roman Catholicism subscribed to the multiple sources of theology model, we can easily understand that its theology will be different from a theology built on the *sola Scriptura* model.

<sup>10</sup>“A Brief History of Adventist Hermeneutics,” *JATS* 4/2 (Autumn 1993): 213–214.

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(1) *Deconstructing Tradition*. “Although the Reformers rejected some customs and traditions, Adventists writers manifested a sharper rejection of tradition.”<sup>11</sup> Early Adventists, then, were aware of the traditions of Christianity their former churches embraced. Yet, instead of taking them as either sources of theology or hermeneutical guides for the interpretation of Scripture or the understanding of its doctrines, they decided to engage them critically. Their critical relation to tradition was not new, only more extensive. This methodological approach is necessary for the application of the *sola Scriptura* principle. Unless we understand tradition, distinguish it from Scripture, and criticize its contents, we will unavoidably confuse ideas received from tradition with biblical ones. Deconstructing tradition, however, is only a negative step necessary to give us access to the ground of Adventist theology, Scripture. Thus, we move now to the second methodological characteristic of early Adventist theology.

(2) *The Tota Scriptura Principle*. Maxwell explains that

the Reformers insisted on the superlative authority of Scripture, yet Adventists have shown a keener appreciation for the authority of the entire Bible. Luther is well known for his tendency to reject James, make very little use of Hebrews, and set up a canon within the canon. Calvin virtually rejected the book of Revelation. The later Scottish-American reformers, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, contemporaries of the Adventist pioneers, rejected the entire OT. But Adventists, and especially the Seventh-day Adventists, insisted on taking truth from the entire Bible.<sup>12</sup>

Because Scripture is the only source of theology, it provides the point of view from which to evaluate, criticize, and replace the teachings transmitted via the tradition of the church. When the *tota Scriptura* principle is added to the *sola Scriptura* principle, something new comes to view in the theological method, namely, the *historicity of Christian theology*, which, regrettably, was and continues to be disregarded as the realm of divine being and action. Thus, this affirmation implicitly brought a new pre-conception of divine reality and activities to the interpretation of Scripture and the understanding of Christian doctrines. From the timeless understanding of reality operative in Christian and Protestant theologies, Adventism implicitly moved to a temporal-historical view of reality. The overarching consequences of this paradigmatic change that *implicitly* took place at the ontological level of early Adventist theology *has not yet been totally perceived and formulated* by either Christian or Adventist theologians. We will come back to this issue in our second article. Let us now turn our attention to the third characteristic of early Adventist method and hermeneutics.

(3) *Typological understanding*. Maxwell remarks that “whereas the Reformers made enthusiastic use of the OT types of the cross, Adventist writers

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid..

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 214.

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made richer use of biblical types and antitypes that were seen to anticipate last-day developments.”<sup>13</sup> The intensification of typological interpretation in early Adventist theology should not be seen as an unrelated oddity, but as direct *consequence of the historical understanding* of reality implicitly incorporated in the *tota scripture* principle. Richard Davidson has convincingly shown that in biblical typology, reality is assumed to be historical, “occurring or existing as recorded in Scripture.”<sup>14</sup> If God’s reality and activities are to be understood historically, then, the typological method becomes the key to grasping the meaning of divine activity in the history of salvation.<sup>15</sup>

So far, Maxwell’s review of early Adventist hermeneutics reveals that Adventist thinkers applied a few basic methodological traits received from Protestant theology with greater consistency and determination than Protestant theologians themselves. We now turn our attention to the fourth hermeneutical principle Maxwell mentions in his article. The pioneers discovered it by applying the previous three methodological principles.

**The Vision.** Maxwell explains, finally, that the difference between Protestant and Adventist hermeneutics should be traced back to the early pioneers’ use of *prophetic fulfillment as a hermeneutical tool*. “Once established as scriptural, the fulfillment of prophecy in the second advent movement became a hermeneutical tool for helping establish the Sabbath, sanctuary, spiritual gifts, true church, second advent doctrines, etc. . . .”<sup>16</sup> Ellen White expresses the same hermeneutical vision in different words. “The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. *It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious*, showing that God’s hand had directed the great Advent movement, and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of his people.”<sup>17</sup> Shortly put, “light from the sanctuary illumed the past, the present, and the future.”<sup>18</sup> Recently, Alberto Timm brought to our attention that the Sabbatarian Adventists used the “end-time eschatological emphasis as the basic hermeneutical framework for the development of a unique doctrinal system integrated by the concept of the cleansing of the sanctuary of Dan 8:14 and the three angels’ messages of Rev 14:6–12.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>14</sup>Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical tupos Structures* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1981), 416–417.

<sup>15</sup>Davidson uncovers “a relationship between the structure of typology and those of salvation history.” The former, he argues, “appear to be identical to constituent elements of salvation history and may therefore be subsumed under that heading as ‘salvation-historical structure.’” He concludes that salvation history “appears to provide the suprastructure within which these additional structural elements are worked out” (ibid., 420–421).

<sup>16</sup>Maxwell, *ibid.*, 214–215.

<sup>17</sup>*The Great Controversy*, 423 [emphasis mine].

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Alberto Ronald Timm, “Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology, 1844–2001: A Brief Historical Overview,” in *Pensar la iglesia hoy: Hacia una eclesiología Adventista*, ed. G. A. Kilngbeil, M. G.

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According to Timm, “the configuration of the whole system” was one of the original contributions of early Adventist theology.<sup>20</sup>

With the passing of time, Adventist believers placed this hermeneutical perspective among the “pillars” of Adventism. According to Ellen White, the pillars were the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath and the Law, the non-immortality of the soul, and the three angels’ messages.<sup>21</sup> Identifying these four teachings as pillars suggests they played a special role in the construction of early Adventist theology. The “pillar” metaphor insinuates that these basic biblical doctrines are bases from which Christian theology is to be constructed. The fact that Ellen White reported one of the pillars, the doctrine of the Sanctuary, as opening to view “a complete system of truth connected and harmonious” suggests the pillars functioned as hermeneutical principles guiding the interpretation of Scripture and the understanding of its doctrines. Arguably, the sanctuary doctrine is the most comprehensive doctrine or motif in Scripture and therefore plays a decisive role in guiding biblical interpretation and the construction of Adventist theology. The revolutionary nature of this macro hermeneutical perspective has not received sufficient attention yet in Adventist scholarship. Let us consider the system of theology early Adventist pioneers envisioned through the lenses provided by “fulfilled prophecy.”

**The System.** From its inception, Adventist theology was systematic. In 1858, James White reported that “the present truth is harmonious in all its parts; its links are all connected; the bearings of all its portions upon each other are like clockwork.”<sup>22</sup> LeRoy Froom saw early Adventist theology as “the base of a coordinated *system* of truth.”<sup>23</sup> According to George Knight, Sabbatarian Adventists produced an integrated theology rather than a list of discrete doctrines.<sup>24</sup> Yet, they did not leave in writing a full account of the system they saw or how

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Klingbeil, and M. A. Núñez (Libertador San Martín: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2002), 287.

<sup>20</sup>Alberto Ronald Timm, “The Sanctuary and the Three Angels’ Messages 1844–1863: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1995), 473.

<sup>21</sup>“The passing of the time in 1844 was a period of great events, opening to our astonished eyes the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God’s people upon the earth, [also] the first and second angels’ messages and the third, unfurling the banner on which was inscribed, ‘The commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.’ One of the landmarks under this message was the temple of God, seen by His truth-loving people in heaven, and the ark containing the law of God. The light of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment flashed its strong rays in the pathway of the transgressors of God’s law. The nonimmortality of the wicked is an old landmark. I can call to mind nothing more that can come under the head of the old landmarks. All this cry about changing the old landmarks is all imaginary.” (*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 30–31; Manuscript 13, 1889).

<sup>22</sup>*Review and Herald*, Jan. 7, 1858.

<sup>23</sup>*Movement of Destiny* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1971), 87.

<sup>24</sup>George Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 86.

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that clockwork connectivity worked out for them.<sup>25</sup> They saw the system in their minds and in its broad profile. Yet, they fell short of exploring, expressing, formulating, explaining, and uncovering all its contents, connections, and consequences. Perhaps we can find the best expression of the theological system that the Sanctuary opened to view in the writings of Ellen White. Even though unfinished, the theological system of Sabbatarian Adventists played a decisive role in their spiritual experience, self-consciousness, and mission.<sup>26</sup>

*Later generations* of Adventist believers *inherited* the hermeneutical vision encapsulated in the Sanctuary doctrine and an unfinished theological task. The as yet unfinished task involves the understanding, expanding, formulating, explaining, and applying of the theological system that the pillar doctrines brought to view.

### **3. Forgetting**

Ellen White's conviction that "we have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history"<sup>27</sup> applies to the vision and theological system that originated the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Have we forgotten them? The vision of early Adventists remains operative in Adventist theology. However, with the passing of time, some influential sectors of Adventism slowly began to forget the theological vision that originated the movement and climaxed with the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863. The forgetting has not happened overnight, nor has it embraced the entire worldwide denomination. How has the forgetting taken place? A detailed answer to this question requires a historical analysis that falls outside the limited reach of this article. Instead, we can briefly consider some general patterns that have somehow contributed to the forgetting of the Adventist vision in some sectors of the Adventist community.

**From Eschatology to Soteriology: Shifting the Emphasis.** The Minneapolis 1888 General Conference presentation by A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner switched the attention of Adventist studies from prophecy (eschatology) to justification by faith and the experience of salvation (soteriology).<sup>28</sup> According to Froom, E. J. Waggoner was convinced that the supreme truth of redemption "was in no sense a diverting departure from the great structural framework of 'present Truth,' as some had unfairly asserted. Instead, it invested the Message

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<sup>25</sup>In his dissertation, Timm concludes that "an appraisal of the interrelationship between such foundational themes as (1) God, (2) the cosmic controversy, (3) the covenant, (4) the sanctuary, (5) the three angels' messages, and (6) the remnant shows that the subjects of the sanctuary and the three angels' messages were not regarded as ends in themselves. These subjects were perceived as connectedly dependent on the transcendent realities of God, the cosmic controversy, and the covenant, with the missiological purpose of preparing a remnant people to live with God throughout eternity" (474).

<sup>26</sup>Knight, *ibid.*, 86.

<sup>27</sup>"General Conference Daily Bulletin" [January 29], 1893, par. 5.

<sup>28</sup>See LeRoy Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, 188–299.



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with greater power, strength, and attractiveness.” Ellen White shared this view by affirming that the message of justification by faith “is the third angel’s message, in verity.”<sup>29</sup> Most Adventists have shared this view over the years.

However, thirty-two years after Minneapolis, a new way of understanding and connecting the entire body of Christian doctrines began to manifest itself in Adventism. “Prescott, the leading Adventist authority on doctrine and former editor of the *Review* (1901–9), felt that the traditional Seventh-day Adventist approach to doctrine resulted in a rigid, compartmentalized system that did not integrate beliefs with the person of Christ. To correct this problem, he published a textbook in 1920 entitled *The Doctrine of Christ*.”<sup>30</sup> Prescott’s purpose in this textbook for students of theology was not “to develop a scheme of systematic theology” but to emphasize “the meaning of the revelation of Christ as an experience in the life.”<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, later on in his book, he affirms that the “great facts concerning Christ,” namely, His death, ascension to heaven, second coming, and glorious eternal Kingdom “are among the grounds of a whole system of thought and habit of feeling, and when taught as such they grow into a scheme of doctrine.”<sup>32</sup> The apparent contradiction between these two statements reveals the tension that exists between the early Adventist theological vision and the classical Protestant vision implicit in Prescott’s Christological approach. As we will see later, with the passing of time, other Adventist thinkers interpreted Scripture and understood Adventist doctrines from this new perspective.

Going beyond Prescott’s explicit practical emphasis, A. G. Daniells understood that Adventist pastors and lay members needed to incorporate in their thinking and lives the 1888 message and experience. According to Daniells, righteousness by faith was “a fundamental, all-embracing truth”<sup>33</sup> which “throws a flood of light upon the great problem of redemption in all its phases.”<sup>34</sup> After enumerating twenty-two doctrinal themes, he went on to explain that this was “the great sweep of truth embraced in the short phrase ‘Righteousness by Faith.’” “The brief phrase, ‘Righteousness by Faith,’ [adds Daniells] opens the door to all the priceless stores of the wealth and glory of the gospel in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>35</sup> According to Daniells, then, the doctrine of righteousness by faith “opens to view” the entire scheme of biblical truths and their interconnect-edness. For Daniells, righteousness by faith plays the same hermeneutical role

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<sup>29</sup>*Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890; *Selected Messages*, 1:372.

<sup>30</sup>Gary Land, “Shaping the Modern Church, 1906–1930,” in *Adventists in America: A History*, ed. Gary Land (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 164.

<sup>31</sup>W. W. Prescott, *The Doctrine of Christ: A Series of Bible Studies for Use in Colleges and Seminaries*, (Takoma Park: Review and Herald, 1920), 37.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 3

<sup>33</sup>A. G. Daniells, *Christ our Righteousness: A Study of the Principles of Righteousness by Faith as Set Forth in the Word of God and the Writings of the Spirit of Prophecy* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1941), 70.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 72–73.

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so far played by the Sanctuary doctrine and the pillars of Adventism. Daniells was probably unaware that his views introduced a tension at the macro hermeneutical level of Adventist theology.

Since 1888, then, two hermeneutical visions have implicitly coexisted in Adventism. As the “righteousness by faith” vision joined the “sanctuary” vision, an imperceptible process of “forgetting” the latter was set in motion. The inner incompatibility of these two visions, however, didn’t become apparent until almost a century later.<sup>36</sup>

**From Sabbath School to University: Shifting the Matrix.** During the 1960’s Adventism entered an unexplored frontier: The University.<sup>37</sup> The matrix from which theological reflection generates shifted from the practical realm of ministry, evangelism, and administration to the technical realm of scholarship. As Adventists entered the scholarly world in which sciences of different kinds are not only taught but also created, they came across new foundational questions. Not surprisingly, these questions challenged Adventist scholars. To answer them, they needed to have an unambiguous, coherently conceived, and clearly formulated systematic set of principles. In simple terms, they needed a vision articulated in academic fashion and a full-fledged theological methodology. Unfortunately, not only did such an academic formulated vision not exist, but also, Adventism was *implicitly* operating with two competing visions: Sanctuary and justification by faith. Consequently, during this period Adventist scholars faced the daunting task of overcoming the theological ambiguities inherited from previous periods and new challenges presented by the academic world without an explicit understanding of the hermeneutical vision or the way in which it functions in the theological method.

Theologians attempted to solve questions originating in the academic community without first addressing the question of hermeneutical presuppositions required in the academic world. Some attempted to answer questions and make sense of Adventist theology from the implicit vision they inherited from their church education. Others slowly adjusted their way of thinking to the academic vision.<sup>38</sup> Gradually, another vision joined the visions already at work in the Ad-

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<sup>36</sup>I am not suggesting that the doctrines of Justification by Faith and the biblical Sanctuary are incompatible. It is their use in the macro hermeneutical role in the construction of Christian theology which is incompatible. This affirmation requires further explanation. As we expand the methodological function of macro-hermeneutical presuppositions in the construction of Christian theology, this issue will become clearer in the mind of some readers.

<sup>37</sup>In 1874, Battle Creek College was created. Since then, a significant number of Adventist colleges have been established not only in the United States but also around the world. However, with the organization of its first two universities, Andrews University in 1960 and Loma Linda University in 1962, the growing worldwide educational program of the Seventh-day Adventist church entered the halls of academe. This new academic setting has forced Adventism to interact in a thus far unfamiliar turf, namely, the scholarly world.

<sup>38</sup>For instance, Jerry Gladson compared his experience on entering university studies with the way ten of the twelve spies felt after recognizing the land (Numbers 13:32, 31). “I felt the same way

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ventist community. The competition against the Sabbatarian Adventist Sanctuary vision gradually grew. So did the church's forgetfulness of the vision on which alone it must stand.

As Adventists engaged in graduate studies and scholarly research, they focused on chronological, archeological, historical, and exegetical issues. This concentration moved theological reflection away from the systematic nature and dynamics of early Adventist thought. Thus, the vision's role in academic research became less and less clear to new generations of Adventists scholars and believers. As the interconnectedness of thought was neglected, Adventist believers began to experience the doctrines of the church as disconnected affirmations severed from the experience of salvation and the mission of the church.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile, communal life and action became absorbed in the practice and mission of the church, to the detriment of theological reflection and advancement. Emphasis on the practical side of church experience set in motion a process that, in time, produced a disconnect between pastors and teachers, practice and theology. The theological drive that directed the future course of Adventism was slowly subsiding and thereby minimizing the importance of the vision and its role in the generation of theological thinking. As theological matters progressively became less important to Adventists, diversity of visions and the theological systems they generate found their home in the church. Within this atmosphere, forgetfulness of the Sanctuary doctrine and its role as hermeneutical key opening to view a complete system of connected and harmonious truth intensified.

#### **4. Shifting**

This momentous forgetting produced at least four paradigmatic shifts in some sectors of the leadership of the church in North America and Europe. As the community forgot the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary doctrine, new generations of Adventists became unable to see by themselves the complete system of truth discovered by the pioneers. By default, a macro hermeneutical shift took place. A new hermeneutical principle began to operate and expand in some sectors of Adventism that opened to view a different system of truth than the one discovered by the pioneers. The shift in hermeneutical vision and theological

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when I entered Vanderbilt University to take up graduate studies in Old Testament. This was certainly the 'land of the giants,' and I wasn't sure my backwoods theology would be sufficient to slay the giant intellects who inhabited it. I saw in each professor a formidable adversary. In order to survive, I thought, I must be able intellectually to impale him upon the logic of my theological position. Since every professor was an avowed historical critic, I was tempted to transfer my insecurity into an adversarial attitude toward the historical-critical method." "Taming Historical Criticism: Adventist Biblical Scholarship in the Land of the Giants," *Spectrum* April 1988, 19.

<sup>39</sup>See, George R. Knight, "Twenty-seven Fundamentals in Search of a Theology," *Ministry* February 2001, 5-7.

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understanding unleashed a chain reaction of paradigmatic shifts in the ground (sources theology), practice of ministry, and self-consciousness of the church.

Leroy Froom's historical review of Adventist theology reveals the ambiguity brewing in Adventist thought during the sixties and seventies. On the backdrop of *Questions on Doctrines*,<sup>40</sup> Adventists differentiated between the so-called "eternal verities" and "testing truths." The former incorporated "the Everlasting Gospel in essence and operation,"<sup>41</sup> while the latter included the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, the Spirit of Prophecy, Conditional Immortality, new aspects of prophecy, and the like.<sup>42</sup> Implicitly or explicitly, the conviction that "practically all Seventh-day Adventist beliefs are held by one or more Christian groups"<sup>43</sup> has become widely accepted in all sectors of Adventism. According to this view, we hold together with most Christian churches the "eternal verities" which include the foundational issues of theology, including the way of salvation. We differ in our views on the existence of a Heavenly Sanctuary, the Investigative Judgment, the Spirit of Prophecy manifested in the ministry and writings of E. G. White, and the Three Angels of Revelation 14 as describing the proclamation of the last message to the world before the coming of Christ.<sup>44</sup> Obviously, Adventists began to relate to the biblical Sanctuary as a doctrine among others without explicitly perceiving its guiding hermeneutical role.

Thus, it seems that almost fifty years ago some sectors of Adventist leadership began to think that there was very little difference between Adventist and Evangelical doctrines. For some, the Adventist Church was no longer the remnant church in the sense of the only true visible church on earth. Instead, they saw Adventism as just another Evangelical denomination. The Sanctuary and the Three Angels Message were no longer conceived as pillars on which a complete system of truth stood, but as pieces of the Evangelical building of truth. This change in conviction may help us to understand the shifts that took place in Adventism in the latter half of the century.

**Shifting the Hermeneutical Vision.** Was the Sanctuary still experienced as "opening to view a complete system of theology"? Froom's analysis of Adventist history exposes some ambiguities regarding both the hermeneutical function of the eschatological vision that gave birth to Adventism and the theological system that it brought to view. On one hand, Froom shows that the "vision" function of the Sanctuary doctrine experienced by E. G. White and the early pioneers was being replaced by the soteriological Protestant perspective. In early Adventism—explains Froom—the newly discovery doctrines had not as yet "found their integral relationship to Christ. They were consequently each held as

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<sup>40</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1957), 21–25.

<sup>41</sup> *Movement of Destiny*, 34.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>43</sup> *Questions on Doctrine*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 24–25.

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largely independent, though related, doctrines.”<sup>45</sup> This evaluation shows how the new soteriological emphasis was beginning to operate as hermeneutical vision from which the entire corpus of doctrines had to be understood. On the other hand, Froom recognized that without the doctrine of the Sanctuary, “we have no justifiable place in the religious world, no distinctive denominational mission and message, no excuse for functioning as a separate church entity today.”<sup>46</sup> Moreover, he also recognized the systematic function of the Sanctuary in Ellen White’s thought. Quoting her, Froom affirms that the doctrine of the Sanctuary “involves and constitutes ‘a complete system of truth’ (GC 423). All other essential truths are actually embraced within it—the moral law, Sabbath, sacrificial Atonement, High-Priestly Mediation, Judgment, Justification and Sanctification, Righteousness by Faith, final rewards and punishments, Second Advent, and total destructions of the incorrigible wicked.”<sup>47</sup>

Froom’s writings seem to indicate that early in the second half of the twentieth century, Adventists were at least ambiguous regarding the hermeneutical vision from which to build their biblical and theological understandings. In theory, the eschatological Sanctuary doctrine is still mentioned, yet not as a vision, but as the embodiment of the system itself. In practice, however, Adventists began to use the soteriological emphasis as hermeneutical vision from which to understand Scripture *and* build their system of theology. Consequently, the Sanctuary hermeneutical vision of Adventism was being replaced by the soteriological hermeneutical vision of Protestantism. Ten years later, Desmond Ford expressed this replacement explicitly and theoretically, unleashing an epochal paradigm shift in Adventist hermeneutics and theology.

Desmond Ford’s articulate, scholarly, and charismatically presented rejection of the Sanctuary doctrine brought his views to the attention of the Church.<sup>48</sup> His rejection gave explicit expression to the implicit hermeneutical shift already taking place in some sectors of Adventism. He replaced the foundational “pillar” on which Adventist theology stands with the soteriological vision of Protestant

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<sup>45</sup>*Movement of Destiny*, 181. He further explains that “not until the transcendent nature and centrality of Christ came to be clearly recognized—and His pre-eminent place established through intensive Bible study, public presentation, and Spirit of Prophecy attestation—could the integral relation of Christ to these doctrines be established and emphasized” (Ibid.).

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 542.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>“Never forget, the Old Testament Day of Atonement pointed to the Christ event, to the cross of Calvary. It is wrong to indulge in calendrical shuffling, trying to bring the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement down to the nineteenth century. The ancient Day of Atonement is not talking about the nineteenth century. It points to the cross of Christ. That’s where the final, full atonement was made. Calvary was the only place of complete atonement. We look only to Calvary, not to an event or date invented by man.” Desmond Ford, *Right with God Right Now: How God Saves People as Shown in the Bible’s Book of Romans* (Newcastle: Desmond Ford, 1998), 55.

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theology.<sup>49</sup> Thus, what Adventism was confronting at the 1980 Glacier View meetings was not only an exegetical challenge to the doctrine of the Sanctuary, but primarily a paradigm shift in the hermeneutical foundations of its theological system.<sup>50</sup> As Ford identified the Protestant interpretation of Justification by Faith originated by Luther<sup>51</sup> with Paul's teachings in Romans, he correctly perceived its inner inconsistency with the Adventist teaching of the investigative judgment. Because Ford was persuaded that "we, as with all other Christians, have been entrusted with 'the everlasting gospel,' it is essential that nothing in our doctrinal presentation should compete or clash with that gospel," the Sanctuary doctrine had to go.<sup>52</sup> In the final analysis, then, Ford felt compelled to abandon the doctrine of the Sanctuary not merely because he believed Adventist exegesis builds on "highly debatable" assumptions,<sup>53</sup> and the unpopular historicist method of prophetic interpretation,<sup>54</sup> but because it conflicted with the Protestant soteriological vision.<sup>55</sup> That Ford explicitly understood and applied the Protestant understanding of Justification by Faith as hermeneutical vision that opens to

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<sup>49</sup>Ford thus brought to fulfillment Ellen White's prediction that the pillars of Adventism will not only be challenged but also changed. "In the future [predicted Ellen White] deception of every kind is to arise, and we want solid ground for our feet. We want solid pillars for the building. Not one pin is to be removed from that which the Lord has established. The enemy will bring in false theories, such as the doctrine that there is no sanctuary. This is one of the points on which there will be a departing from the faith. Where shall we find safety unless it be in the truths that the Lord has been giving for the last fifty years?" (*Review and Herald*, May 25, 1905; *Evangelism*, 224).

<sup>50</sup>"The center of the earthquake, however, is a doctrinal one—the gospel and the sanctuary. That the Pauline righteousness by faith is the technical term for justification alone, that Christ's human nature was spiritually like that of Adam before the fall, that believers have the verdict of the Last Judgment the moment they believe and for as long as they believe, and that the investigative judgment has no basis in Scripture, nor the date 1844—these revelations have left many reeling and dazed, while having an opposite impact on others who are worshiping in the same pews" (Desmond and Gillian Ford, *The Adventist Crisis of Spiritual Identity* [Newcastle: Desmond Ford, 1982], 4).

<sup>51</sup>See, *Right with God Right Now*, 35–48.

<sup>52</sup>*Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry: Euangelion, 1980), i).

<sup>53</sup>"Our traditional sanctuary interpretation of 1844 and the investigative judgment . . . is dependent, not upon plain didactic statements from Scripture, but upon a prolonged series of assumptions and inferences—most of which are highly debatable" [emphasis ours] (*The Adventist Crisis*, 95).

<sup>54</sup>"Today, biblical scholarship almost completely rejects the adoption of the historicist package of prophetic interpretation of apocalyptic [sic]. But the distinctive and special emphases of Adventism, 1844 in particular, spring [sic] from the whole-hearted acceptance of the interpretive positions that almost all other scholars reject" (*The Adventist Crisis*, 82).

<sup>55</sup>"To even infer that Christ's atoning work at Calvary was not complete but required another phase; to suggest that the merits of the blood of the Savior did not reach the Most Holy Place until 1844; to intimate that our Lord for over eighteen centuries was engaged in a ministry which represented the limited privileges of the Jewish pre-cross era (Heb. 9:6–9); to create the fear that one's eternal salvation rested to any extent on the basis of works rather than faith alone, and that the issue of the judgment depends in part on the exigency (rather than the reality) of Christian growth—[sic] is to imperil the blessed gospel" (*Daniel 8:14*, i).

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view a complete system of theology becomes apparent from his statement that “when the gospel of grace is understood then that truth coordinates all other truths including such apparently esoteric matters as prophecy and the human nature of our Lord.”<sup>56</sup>

Even though Adventism officially condemned Ford’s rejection of the Sanctuary doctrine and the historicist interpretation of prophecy at the 1980 Glacier View meetings, some still think his views represent real theological progress. This sector uses the “Gospel” (Justification by Faith understood à la Luther) as the hermeneutical “vision” through which the Bible is understood and the entire system of theology is constructed. The result of applying this vision is a wholesale reinterpretation of Adventist doctrines and practice.<sup>57</sup>

Adventists using this new hermeneutical vision to understand the system of Christian thought and doctrines become convinced that the pioneers’ understanding of the Sanctuary was wrong and that the Church should recognize this error and rectify it for future generations. A going back to Protestantism replaces the early going out of the pioneers.<sup>58</sup> Believers thinking along these lines make up the so-called Evangelical Adventism. Though Adventists in name and affiliation, in thought and practice they belong to the Protestant community. Evangelical Adventism is not an organized community, but a way of thinking theologically within Adventism. Believers following this way of thinking usually believe that they represent the “true” Adventist thinking to which the church should eventually come around. Probably, most of the believers thinking along these lines have never understood the doctrine of the Sanctuary or used it as a hermeneutical key to grasp the complete system of Biblical truth. Evangelical Adventism leads either to a radical reinterpretation of doctrine or to defection.<sup>59</sup>

However, a problem with ignoring, rejecting, or replacing the Sanctuary doctrine is that, as Froom put it, without the Sanctuary doctrine, Adventism has “no justifiable place in the religious world, no distinctive denominational mis-

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<sup>56</sup>*The Adventist Crisis*, 80.

<sup>57</sup>The best example I know of the reinterpretation of Adventism when the Sabbatarian pillars of early Adventism are replaced by the Protestant interpretation of the Gospel is Steve Daily’s *Adventism for a New Generation* (Portland: Better Living, 1993). That Daily does not understand Christianity from the Sanctuary vision of early Adventists becomes clear when he states, after quoting in full the twenty third Fundamental Belief describing the official Adventist teaching on the Sanctuary, “If you made sense out of that, congratulations. The sanctuary doctrine, with its emphasis on an investigative judgment, has been challenged and questioned more than any other Adventist belief throughout the history of the church. It has generally had little meaning or practical relevance—except in a negative sense” (160).

<sup>58</sup>Early Adventists identified their “going out” of Protestantism experience with the second angel’s message.

<sup>59</sup>For instance, the “Proclamation” magazine edited by Dale Ratzlaff gives expression to the experience of ex-Adventists that never used the Sanctuary doctrine as a vision that opens to view a complete system of truth coherent and harmonious. Implicitly, they understand Christianity from the Evangelical theological perspective.

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sion and message, no excuse for functioning as a separate church entity today.”<sup>60</sup> Without the Sanctuary doctrine hermeneutical role, the only reasons that remain to explain Adventism to the world are cultural. Not surprisingly, some propose Adventism should join the ecumenical movement; others leave the church to join Protestant denominations.

**Shifting the Ground.** Forgetfulness of the theological revolution that gave birth to Adventist theology soon extended beyond the hermeneutical vision of the Sanctuary to the *sola Scriptura* principle from which it sprang. By the end of the twentieth century, a sector of the Adventist theological community abandoned the *sola Scriptura* principle on which early Adventists built their theological system, replacing it with the multiple sources approach on which Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians constructed their theological views.<sup>61</sup> Thus, some Adventist thinkers no longer understand Christianity and the world from Scripture. Instead, they attempt to understand Scripture from contemporary science and culture.<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps the writer that has formulated this shift with greatest clarity and scholarship is Fritz Guy.<sup>63</sup> For him, theology is no longer the investigation of divine truth revealed in Scripture, as it is for most Adventists even today, but

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<sup>60</sup>*Movement of Destiny*, 542.

<sup>61</sup>For an introduction to the plurality of theological sources in Protestant theology, see, for instance, Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

<sup>62</sup>This paradigmatic change in Adventist hermeneutics clearly appears in a recent article on the interpretation of Genesis 1. In the introduction, the author lays down his hermeneutical approach: “Our central question is this: in the light of what we understand scientifically and theologically in the twenty-first century, how shall we interpret Genesis 1?” (Fritz Guy, “Interpreting Genesis One in the Twenty-first Century,” *Spectrum* 31/2 (2003): 5). Thus, Guy understands Scripture in the light of science and not the other way around. That this approach is a reversal of Adventist hermeneutics can be appreciated when we learn that Ellen White understands science in the light of Scripture. “The Bible is not to be tested by men’s idea of science, but science is to be brought to the test of this unerring standard. When the Bible makes statements of facts in nature, science may be compared with the Written Word, and a correct understanding of both will always prove them to be in harmony. One does not contradict the other. All truth, whether in nature or revelation, agrees” (*Selected Messages* [Washington: Review and Herald, 1980], 3: 307–308). When Ellen White says that “all truth agrees” (all truth is God’s truth), she is not inviting us to achieve such agreement by accommodating Scripture to science. On the contrary, she invites us to evaluate and even reject scientific theories when they disagree with biblical teachings. “Inferences erroneously drawn from facts observed in nature have, however, led to supposed conflict between science and revelation; and in the effort to restore harmony, interpretations of Scripture have been adopted that undermine and destroy the force of the word of God. Geology has been thought to contradict the literal interpretation of the Mosaic record of the creation. Millions of years, it is claimed, were required for the evolution of the earth from chaos; and in order to accommodate the Bible to this supposed revelation of science, the days of creation are assumed to have been vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years. Such a conclusion is wholly uncalled for. The Bible record is in harmony with itself and with the teaching of nature” (*Education* [Mountain View: Pacific, 1952], 128–129).

<sup>63</sup>For an introduction to and evaluation of Guy’s *Thinking Theologically*, see Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2003), 110–116.



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rather the attempt to understand our religious experience as expressed in beliefs.<sup>64</sup> In so doing, he places his understanding of Adventism within the modern theological tradition as expressed in the History of Religions School of theological thought.<sup>65</sup> This indicates not only an abandonment of the *sola Scriptura* principle in favor of the multiple sources of theology paradigm,<sup>66</sup> but also a radical reinterpretation of the origin and nature of Scripture.<sup>67</sup> The modern view that Scripture preserves humanly originated religious convictions replaces the Adventist view that Scripture directly discloses God's mind and acts in history in thoughts and words.<sup>68</sup> The multiple sources approach led modern theologians to believe that Biblical writers used the culture and ideas of their day to convey their personal noncognitive encounters with God. According to this view, the

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<sup>64</sup>At the beginning of his book, Guy candidly agrees with modernist theologian Langdon Gilkey's definition of theology as "the interpretation of faith—that is, thinking about the meaning of faith— theology is the activity of thinking as carefully, comprehensively, and creatively as possible about the content, basis, and implications of one's own religious life, including experience (or 'spirituality') and practice as well as belief" (*Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* [Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1999], 4).

<sup>65</sup>Guy takes his definition of theology from Langdon Gilkey (4, n.4). Here we have an example of how many Adventist theologians derive their basic theological assumptions from other theologians, neglecting the necessary work of theological deconstruction. For an introduction to the notion of *Religionsgeschichte* see Ernst Troeltsch's, *Religion in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). Notable theologians approaching systematic theology from this perspective are, for instance, Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, trans. ed. from the 2nd German ed. (1830) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928); *The Christian Faith*, trans. Garrett E. Paul (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

<sup>66</sup>"Strictly speaking the Reformation motto *Sola scriptura*, 'By Scripture alone,' popularly interpreted as 'the Bible and the Bible only,' has always been a polemical exaggeration. . . . Historically and experientially, a more accurate motto is *prima scriptura*, 'By Scripture first of all.' Perhaps even better would be an affirmation of something like the 'Wesleyan quadrilateral' consisting of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience" (*Thinking Theologically*, 137). See also Richard Rice, *Reason and the Contours of Faith* (Riverside: La Sierra UP, 1991), 88–98; and Woodrow W. Whidden, "Sola Scriptura, Inerrantist Fundamentalism and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Is 'No Creed but the Bible' a Workable Solution," *AUSS* 35/2 (1997): 211–226.

<sup>67</sup>"Because of the ontological difference between our reality and God's—that is, between finitude and infinity—our language cannot be applied directly to God," (*Thinking Theologically*, 187). As Scripture belongs to human language, we cannot find in it divine revelation. The ontological difference, as understood by Guy (he does not expand about such a foundational issue in his book), prohibits it. Of course, if the ontological difference could be interpreted differently, then divine revelation should be understood differently as well. This conviction stems from the implicit acceptance of the empirical-Kantian limitation of knowledge to things and events that take place in space and time. Since God, the infinite, does not act in time as finite beings do, humans cannot know God directly, neither can God speak directly to humans in space and time.

<sup>68</sup>"An adequate interpretation of faith [explains Guy] must exhibit, among other things, faith's cognitive content; it must show the relationships of faith to what is believed to be true about the world and humane existence. *Apart from these relationships, faith is literally 'meaningless,'* however peaceful, exhilarated, virtuous, or valuable it might make a person feel" (*ibid.*, 190; emphasis mine).

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contents of Scripture are merely the human “faith” response to divine encounters with God.<sup>69</sup> Thus, Scripture is human tradition, not divine revelation. It is only by faith that we are able to experience the event of divine revelation that lies behind and beyond biblical words and teachings. Theology is understood as Christian tradition instead of as biblical revelation.<sup>70</sup>

Even though the abandonment of the *sola Scriptura* principle is more divisive than Ford’s views on the Sanctuary doctrine, the Adventist church has not yet officially addressed this shift and its theological implications as outlined in Guy’s theological methodology.<sup>71</sup> Yet, a growing number of Adventist intellectuals are building their theological views along these lines. Some belonging to this way of thinking call themselves “Progressive Adventists.” For this group of Adventists, “progress” means adapting the Adventist “faith” (doctrines they received via Adventist tradition) and biblical teachings to modern science and contemporary culture.<sup>72</sup> During the second half of the twentieth century, this sort of Adventist *aggiornamento* emerged around large institutions with a high concentration of college and university trained believers.

For many Adventists facing questions for which they have no answers, adjusting their beliefs seems the only way to maintain intellectual honesty and spiritual sanity. Questions on the meaning and understanding of the Adventist belief system soon replaced questions on biblical interpretation. Because of its history, Adventism was better prepared to answer the latter. Thus, the growth and development of Adventism created a need the church did not address while it was growing. Individually, Adventist believers sought to answer questions as best they could.

Generally, Adventists integrated theological, scientific, and pastoral views that fit their understanding of Scripture with belief systems borrowed from other denominations. As new questions arose, some influential teachers, pastors, and

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<sup>69</sup>See, for instance, Herold Weiss, “Revelation and the Bible: Beyond Verbal Inspiration,” *Spectrum* 7/3 (1975): 49–54; and Edward W. H. Vick, *Speaking Well of God* (Nashville: Southern, 1979), 21–22.

<sup>70</sup>Karl Barth’s view that Scripture is not revelation but testifies about it, notably, about Jesus Christ. For an analysis and criticism of the Modern Model of Revelation-Inspiration in general, and, of Karl Barth’s view in particular, see my *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundations of Christian Theology in a Postmodern World* (Lanham: UP of America, 2001).

<sup>71</sup>Unfortunately, Guy does not develop his view of revelation and inspiration, leaving his readers to guess from the scattered clues they may find in related issues or passing statements throughout his *Thinking Theologically*. For instance, he states that “theologically, the canonical New Testament writings constitute the primary witness to the revelation of God in the person of Jesus the Messiah, and to think theologically as a Christian is to recognize the primacy of these writings” (*Thinking Theologically*, 126).

<sup>72</sup>See Ervin Taylor, “Progressive Adventism: A Nonfundamentalist Vision,” *Adventist Today*, On line edition, September-October 2001. Steve Daily reports that “there is a ‘spirit of hopelessness’ that many Adventists are struggling with, who want to see change in the church. And change in the direction that our culture is moving in general today, but who feel helpless to do anything about it” (*Adventism for a New Generation*, 3rd ed. [Portland: Better Living, 1994], xvi).

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administrators integrated secular and theological ideas they thought harmonized with Scripture. Unfortunately, many of them were incompatible with it. As new generations of Adventist believers received these new ideas from within the Adventist grapevine, they logically experienced them as Adventist teachings. Inconsistencies were adjusted by further adapting biblical thinking to new developments in religious and secular culture.<sup>73</sup> Over time, this process shaped the theological understanding and practice of cultural/progressive Adventism, which obviously developed in directions quite different from the biblically grounded beliefs of their Church.

That Progressive Adventists are serious about radically changing Adventism becomes clear when one learns their views about origins. Their deep certainty that we should build our beliefs on a multiplex of sources leads them to the unavoidable conviction that science, not Scripture, tells the truth about the history of life on earth. Thus, to reject scientific “truth” is tantamount to rejecting “present truth.”<sup>74</sup> On the face of mounting scientific evidence—they contend—Adventists can no longer intelligently and honestly believe in a six-day literal historical creation. To accommodate the long ages of science,<sup>75</sup> they read the Genesis account “theologically.”<sup>76</sup> According to this view, evolution and creation are not contradictory because creation does not speak about the historical process through which life originated, but about creaturely dependence on “ultimate reality.”<sup>77</sup> While evolutionary theory enlightens us about the history of life on earth, Scripture enlightens us about the “spiritual,” “metaphysical” rather than physical side of reality.<sup>78</sup>

Accommodating the Genesis narrative to evolutionary theory requires also a change in the traditional Adventist understanding of revelation-inspiration. How

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<sup>73</sup>The search for meaning requires belief systems to be consistent and coherent. All beliefs and teachings should be consistent between themselves and coherent with the realities to which they refer.

<sup>74</sup>“I fear that if church leaders insist on adopting a literal, fundamentalist biblical interpretation in this matter [the long ages of life on earth], they will demonstrate that they are turning their backs on ‘present truth’” (Ervin Taylor, “Before Adam,” *Adventist Today* November-December 1994, 21).

<sup>75</sup>“There is overwhelming evidence, collected over the past two centuries in a wide spectrum of scientific disciplines, showing that the time frame for the fossil record should be measured in hundreds of millions of years. Within the last century, impressive evidence has also been collected suggesting that the time frame for human-like fossils (hominids)—and the artifacts they fabricated—extends back hundreds of thousands and even several million years” (ibid., 20).

<sup>76</sup>Fritz Guy, “Interpreting Genesis One,” 5–16.

<sup>77</sup>Thus, Fritz Guy invites us to consider Genesis 1 “as a fundamental—that is, foundational—expression of the relation of God, humanity and the world.” Immediately he expands his thought by quoting Jürgen Moltmann’s theological definition of creation: “Creation is the term that describes the miracle of existence in general” (*God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* [San Francisco: Harper, 1985], 196, in Fritz Guy, “Interpreting Genesis One,” 11).

<sup>78</sup>After arguing that “taken literally,” the two explanations of creation [Genesis 1 and 2] “are incompatible” Fritz Guy affirms that taken theologically, “there is no conflict at all, because the two explanations of creation ‘offer complementary spiritual truths’” (“Interpreting Genesis One,” 12).

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else could we explain why God inspired a text depicting a historical six-day creative process while all the time attempting to communicate a spiritual non-historical truth. If the truth of creation was spiritual, why did God not inspire the prophets to say it plainly? If theologians can explain the so-called spiritual meaning of creation clearly, why was God unable to make it clear to biblical writers in the first place? Why did God decide not to use evolutionary history to convey theological truth?

To answer these and other related questions, some Progressive Adventists use an idiosyncratic understanding of revelation-inspiration commonly known as “thought inspiration.” According to this view, God inspired thoughts but not the words.<sup>79</sup> Biblical “errors” like the six-day creation account may be explained as originating in the writers’ words, not in God’s ideas.<sup>80</sup> By wedging a gap between thought and words, they attempt to make room for a theological interpretation of the ideas God revealed to the prophet.<sup>81</sup> One problem with this view is that in human communication we cannot separate words from thought. Without words, we have no access to the thoughts of others. Thus, theological interpretation is unable to do what it is supposed to do, that is, to reach the divine message that stands beyond and outside the text. When the Modern model of revelation-inspiration—according to which human imagination and not divine inspiration is responsible for the contents of the Genesis account of creation—is adopted, this problem disappears. There is no need to explain here how the Modern model or notion of revelation-inspiration single-handedly destructs the entire building of Christian teachings.

These paradigmatic changes in the understanding of theological sources, the doctrine of revelation-inspiration, and the history of human life have a broad hermeneutical impact on the task of doing Adventist theology. If accepted by the church, these changes necessarily require a wholesale reinterpretation of Adventist theology and life in the image of Protestant and Roman Catholic theologies. However, Progressive Adventists seem oblivious to the hermeneutical and

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<sup>79</sup>Raymond F. Cottrell explains the basic premise of Thought Inspiration in the following way. In Scripture “the message itself is of divine origin, and the language and thought forms in which it is expressed reflect the personal characteristics and cultural background of the respective writers” (“Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World,” in *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives*, ed. James L. Hayward [Roseville: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000], 195).

<sup>80</sup>The hermeneutical consequences of Thought Inspiration for the interpretation of Genesis 1 are clear. “Inasmuch as the message from God revealed in the Bible is inspired and the form in which it comes to us is human, it is reasonable to conclude that the message itself is inviolate but that the form may reflect an incomplete or imperfect human perspective.” (ibid., 5).

<sup>81</sup>“The problems here to be considered [interpretation of the Genesis creation story] are not inherent with the inspired message, rightly understood; they may arise from the uninspired form or our faulty understanding of either the message or the form. It is also reasonable to conclude that objective criteria are needed by which to distinguish between the message and the uninspired form in which it comes to us.” The objective criteria, of course, are provided by human scientific theories. (ibid., 5–6).

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systematic role that the doctrine of evolution plays in contemporary thinking. They seem to accept deep time and the evolutionary ideas that come with it as explanation for the fossil column and the origin of life on earth, forgetting that when accepted, these ideas necessarily become the vision that opens to view an alternate system of truth.<sup>82</sup> Shifting the ground of Adventist theology from the *sola Scriptura* principle to the multiple sources of theology matrix, then, necessarily requires changing the hermeneutical vision. In other words, the change of ground requires the replacement of the Sanctuary doctrine and the other so-called “pillars” as macro hermeneutical principles of Adventist theology.<sup>83</sup>

Since the theological views of both Progressive and Biblical Adventists stem from deep intellectual and religious convictions, it is unlikely that further reflection will integrate them in one harmonious theological system. Progressive Adventists seem to consider that the stark incompatibility that exists between their way of thinking and Biblical Adventism does not endanger the future of the church. On the contrary, they think their contribution is indispensable for the very survival of Adventism in contemporary society. They are committed to redeeming Adventism from its humble intellectual beginnings and its nineteenth-century mistakes.

Besides, they seem to believe that their rejection of the *sola Scriptura* principle and the hermeneutical changes it unleashes does not endanger church unity. According to them, community is primary, theological thinking is secondary.<sup>84</sup> Theological divisions should not threaten the unity of the church because unity does not depend on theological understanding but on the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit generating communitarian love. They reason that since love is all-inclusive, it should be enough to build unity among all Adventist believers—no matter how incompatible their theological views may be. On this basis, there is little motivation to examine, evaluate, or reject divergent theological views in the light of biblical thinking. On the other side, millions of Adventist believers around the world wonder how their “progressive” brothers and sisters are able to accept teachings that contradict not only the biblical ground and macro hermeneutical principles on which Adventism stands, but also the inner logic of biblical thought.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>For an illustration of the hermeneutical role of the evolution in philosophy and theology, see, for instance, Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Gifford lectures, 1927–28 (New York: Macmillan, 1960); and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959).

<sup>83</sup>The notion of the non-immortality of the soul is an exception, as it passes the scientific test.

<sup>84</sup>Richard Rice, *Believing, Behaving, Belonging: Finding New Love for the Church* (Roseville: Association of Adventist Forums, 2002), 110, 208.

<sup>85</sup>Clifford Goldstein understands the overall incompatibility between evolution and Adventist theology when he writes that “what amazes me isn’t so much that people can believe in evolution (after all, I used to), but that those who do still want to be Seventh-day Adventists. I can respect someone who, believing in evolutionary theory, rejects the Adventist Church entirely. I have no respect for those who think they can meld the two” (“Seventh-day Darwinians,” *Adventist Review*

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The shift from *sola Scriptura* to the multiplex of theological sources from which Progressive Adventist thinking proceeds requires a complete reshaping of Adventist theology and practice. If accepted, this shift will accelerate and intensify deep divisions in the Adventist community around the world. Moreover, accommodating to rapidly changing trends in philosophical, scientific, and entertainment cultures plunges Adventism into the whirlwind of never-ending conforming to the patterns of this world, thereby explicitly contradicting Paul's injunction to do the opposite (Romans 12:2).

**Shift in the Self-Consciousness of the Church.** Pastor Jan Paulsen, current President of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, seems to perceive a change in the self-consciousness of the Church. He sees many Adventists losing their sense of identity.

There are many things we have in common and can do in common with Christians of other churches, but we are Christians of a very specific identity. That identity is reflected in teachings, in what we value, and in our quality of life. I wonder: Have we become or are we becoming more recognizable as "Christians" than we are as Seventh-day Adventist Christians? And is it possible that this is something we'd like to see happen and, therefore, are being deliberate about projecting ourselves in his manner? To the extent that this is so, what is it that has brought us to this point? Is it a consequence of "theological mobbing"? Is it a consequence of an inferiority complex? Is it a consequence of just wanting to blend in better?<sup>86</sup>

It seems that the paradigmatic changes in the hermeneutical vision and theological sources that have taken place in some sectors of Adventism have influenced not only our biblical interpretation and doctrinal understanding, but also our communal self-understanding. After all, the way we think determines who we are (Proverbs 23:7) and what we do.

The Sanctuary hermeneutical vision and the system of theology that it opened to view led Adventist pioneers to leave their churches and form a new one. The notion of being the visible eschatological remnant representing Christ in the time of the end gave unity, identity, and a sense of mission to Adventism.<sup>87</sup> Biblical Adventists continue to sense the same unity, an identity that

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(Online edition, July 24, 2003). Answering those who do not see the incompatibility, Goldstein explains, "if evolution is true, then the Adam and Eve story becomes null and void. If that's null and void, what happens to the Fall? Without the Fall, the cross becomes an empty gesture, which destroys any grounds for the Second Coming. Thus, it seems impossible to reconcile Adventism with evolution. Someone can be one (an Adventist) or the other (an evolutionist), but not both. All of which comes to the real point of my article: considering that evolution and Adventism cannot be reconciled, should we be paying people to stand in our classrooms or pulpits and promote evolution?" (*Adventist Review*, Online edition, Sept 25, 2003).

<sup>86</sup>"The Theological Landscape," Supplement to the *Adventist Review*, June 13 2002, 3–8.

<sup>87</sup>Commenting on early Adventism (1844–1885) George Knight remarks that "the placement of their theology in the framework of the last great conflict between good and evil set forth in the heart

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propels them in relentless mission and explosive growth around the world. As the Evangelical and Progressive sectors in Adventism shifted their hermeneutical visions and the sources of theology from which they sought to understand Adventist theology and experience, their self-consciousness as members of the community began to change accordingly. The system of biblical theology of early Adventism became increasingly problematic for them. Instead of being critical of Christian tradition and theological methodology, they used them as the perspective from which to understand Scripture,<sup>88</sup> doctrines, experience, and the mission of the church.<sup>89</sup> They rejected the notion of the remnant as arrogant and unbiblical and understood themselves as members of the broader Christian Evangelical community of churches, even of a “spiritual ecumenicity” that overcomes “the sin of fragmentation and divisiveness” among Christian denominations.<sup>90</sup>

In this context, the question arises: What does it mean to be an Adventist rather than an Evangelical Christian? Does the Adventist church have a reason to exist as a separate denomination? Let us consider an answer that Progressive Adventism gives to this question. After describing theological changes in Adventist history, Fritz Guy questions whether we can still speak of “authentic” Adventist Christianity. “If we no longer read scripture the way Adventists initially read it, if we no longer believe what Adventists initially believed, and if we no longer think the way Adventists initially thought, in what sense are we still authentically Adventist?”<sup>91</sup> His most appealing reason seems to be one’s personal “choice of the Adventist community as a spiritual home and the adoption of the Adventist past as a part of spiritual identity.”<sup>92</sup> According to this way

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of the book of Revelation gave it an urgency that eventually set the Sabbatarians upon an ever-expanding mission of warning the world” (*A Search for Identity*, 86).

<sup>88</sup>See, for instance, Jerry Gladson, “Taming Historical Criticism,” 19–34.

<sup>89</sup>For instance, Guy thinks that “Adventist theology is not methodologically unique among Christian theologies. It is, to be sure, Protestant rather than Catholic, and it is generally more ‘conservative’ than ‘liberal’ (as these terms are commonly used). But it does not have its own separate way of thinking theologically. If it did, we would have to persuade other Christians to accept our theological method before they could find our theological thinking intelligible enough to warrant careful attention” (*Thinking Theologically*, viii–ix). He also defines Adventist experience, practice, and belief in continuity with general Christianity. “To be Adventist is to be, first and foremost, Christian; and what is most important in Adventist experience, practice, and belief is not what differentiates us from other Christians, but what unites us to them” (*Ibid.*, ix).

<sup>90</sup>Steve Daily, *Adventism for a New Generation*, 313.

<sup>91</sup>(*Thinking Theologically*, 92). Obviously, Guy’s affirmation reveals the positive way in which he evaluates change in Adventist theology. Change is good because it stems from “the basic Adventist principle of present truth” (*Ibid.*, 80). The community of faith’s experience (present truth) replaces the pillars of the church.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 92. Guy’s answer to the question: “in what sense are we still authentically Adventist?” is even more revealing. What defines our uniqueness as Adventists, according to Fritz Guy, revolves around the following points: (1) Openness to present truth; (2) salvation as gift of grace as center of personal experience; (3) contemporary importance of the Sabbath; (4) anticipation of the Second Coming; (5) spiritual significance of spiritual health; and (6) “the choice of the Adventist community

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of thinking, Adventism has no compelling theological features that may draw other Christians to become Adventists. For Guy, “authentic”<sup>93</sup> Adventism becomes the best available particular actualization of Christianity.<sup>94</sup> For this sector of Adventism to become or to remain a member of the Adventist “community”<sup>95</sup> seems to depend more on sociological than theological reasons.<sup>96</sup> That was not so in the beginning.

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as a spiritual home and the adoption of the Adventist past as a part of spiritual identity” (Ibid., 92; compare with page 80). However, other Christian denominations also share some or all of the issues mentioned in points 1–5. By themselves, these points do not give sufficient reason to belong to the Adventist Church rather than to any other Evangelical denomination.

<sup>93</sup>“Authentic” Adventism seems to refer to the way in which Progressive Adventists have retrieved and reinterpreted the Adventist tradition they received from their parents. To speak about “authentic” Adventism implies the existence of “inauthentic” Adventism, presumably involving those that have different views. For the basic content of “authentic” Adventism, see, n. 87, above.

<sup>94</sup>Explaining why he speaks about “Adventist Christianity” rather than just “Adventism,” Guy hopes “this usage will serve as a gentle but frequent reminder that our distinctiveness is not the proper center of our theology or our spirituality.” A few sentences later, he specifies the way in which he understands the relation between Adventism and the Christian world. “Adventist spirituality, practice, and belief constitute not the epitome or perfection of Christianity but a particular actualization of it—one that for me along with many others is the best available, and it continues to be nurturing, challenging, and rewarding” (*Thinking Theologically*, 10). Here we are far from the notion of remnant church or the sanctuary doctrine as vision from which the Adventist pioneers discovered a complete system of theology and truth. Instead, Guy, notable representative of Progressive Adventism, seems to understand the system of Christian theology from the methodological of the classical and modern traditions of Christian theologies from which he draws freely.

<sup>95</sup>The progressive sector prefers to speak about the Adventist “community” instead of the more traditional “Adventist Church” designation. “I want to use the word ‘community’ instead of ‘church’—explains Guys—as a frequent reminder of the ideal we are called to actualize as often and as well as we can. The incidental fact that a Christian community of faith is usually organized into a structured church does not alter the essential fact that it is, first and foremost, a community. It is important to the health of the community that it recognize the ways in which its organizational structures tend to distort and subvert its nature as a community” (*Thinking Theologically*, 34–35). Yet, Scripture uses the term “church” to identify the community of Christ. While the biblical word “church” refers to a community, it distinguishes it with theological precision from all other human communities. Then, we can hardly ignore it or replace it with the more general term “community.” While Guy correctly affirms that organizations and structure tend to “distort” and “subvert” the nature of the community, he seems to forget that no community can exist without organization and structure. Thus, avoiding organization and structure is not the solution to avoiding “distorting” and “subverting” the nature of the community. Organization and structure are not the problem. The way we think theologically is the problem. The solution is to think and act biblically. By so doing, the community becomes the church of Jesus Christ. For an extended study on the community side of the Church, see Richard Rice, *Believing, Behaving, Belonging*.

<sup>96</sup>In a book that correctly stresses the importance and structural role that communal life plays in Christianity and provides many useful insights and correctives for American individualism, Richard Rice argues that “belonging” to the community of faith has priority over believing and behaving. (*Believing, Behaving, Belonging*, 110). In his conclusion, he affirms that the central point of his book is to anchor “believing and behaving solidly in the life of the community. Belonging is not only more fundamental than believing and behaving, it is also fundamental to believing and behaving. In other words, as Christians we believe and we behave as members of a community” (Ibid., 208). I



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**Shifting the Practice of Ministry.** The theological changes taking place within Adventism also affect the everyday practice of ministry. The forgetting of the Adventist vision by “balanced” Adventists, the introduction of new pillars by “Evangelical” Adventists, and the rejection of the *sola Scriptura* principle by “Progressive” Adventists have slowly produced a crisis of identity not only in theologians and teachers, but also in pastors and members of the church. With the passing of time, some sectors of Adventism forgot the biblical pillars and were unable to pass them on to new generations. A major sector of Adventism received the pillars, but neglected to use them in further understanding biblical truth.<sup>97</sup> As we explained earlier, this vacuum imperceptibly led some to borrow extra-biblical pillars, from which Adventist thinking and practice began to shape itself in the image of a declining Protestantism and Modernism. Thus, recent generations of Adventists have found it increasingly difficult to see and experience the harmonious system of biblical truth as their ancestors did. As new pillars stood on non-biblical grounds, Adventists began not only to understand Christian theology as Protestant do, but also to incorporate methods in the practice of ministry that fit and harmonize with the Evangelical and Modernistic theological systems.

As these changes were taking place inside Adventism, dramatic changes were taking place outside. The rapid secularization<sup>98</sup> produced by modernity displaced a God-centered culture with a culture revolving around the self-interests of human beings. When by the middle of the twentieth century postmodernity<sup>99</sup> replaced modernity, the frame of mind of secular western society

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agree with the last statement. What precedes, however, needs better formulation. In what sense does our belonging to the community have priority over belief and behaving? To give priority to community over belief seems friendly to Roman Catholic and Protestant use of tradition as source of theology and hermeneutical principles. Interestingly, Rice’s emphasis: “belonging, believing, and behaving” does not match the title of his book. From a biblical perspective, we should affirm the interdependence in which these three levels or dimensions of Christian experience necessarily take place. There is no primacy of one level over the other, but systematic integration.

<sup>97</sup>During the early eighties many were of the conviction that had Desmond Ford not challenged the Sanctuary Doctrine as he did, it would have disappeared anyway by neglect and lack of use.

<sup>98</sup>Millard Erickson defines secularism as “the tendency to conceive of reality and to establish one’s values in terms of the observable or the mundane, the worldly” (*Where is Theology Going*, 102). For an introduction to Postmodernity see, Humberto M. Rasi and Fritz Guy, eds., *Meeting the Secular Mind: Some Adventist Perspectives: Selected Working Papers of the Committee on Secularism of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1987).

<sup>99</sup>For an introduction to Postmodernity see, for instance, Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); and Robert C. Greer, *Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003). “With the advent of postmodernity, then, Western culture has arrived at a historic crossroads. What was considered unthinkable only a few years ago is now widely regarded as normal: Nietzsche’s prophecy has finally come to pass. Postmodernism has replaced modernism. The enormity of this paradigm shift is difficult to overstate. It is comparable to the paradigm shift that brought into existence the

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became relativistic and decidedly pluralistic. The revolution in communication technology, notably television<sup>100</sup> and the internet,<sup>101</sup> has intensified these cultural changes exponentially and disseminated them globally. Christian denominations fought back the only way they knew how: by further accommodating themselves to rapid philosophical, scientific, and cultural changes.<sup>102</sup> The notion behind this method of fighting secularization with secularization is that secularizing the church in the “non essentials” will attract secular-minded individuals to the “essentials” of Christianity. To put it simply, a secular package will attract secular individuals to the sacred “spiritual” content of Christianity. Even though this strategy properly fits the Evangelical and Progressive theological visions and systems, Biblical Adventists also began “testing” this strategy in their worship rituals and in their ministry to the youth.

In the Church, pastors and evangelists are in charge of “packaging” the message to attract the attention of over-stimulated audiences. To attract interest for the church’s message, this approach lets culture dictate the patterns of ministerial activity. Divine wisdom treasured in Scripture and Ellen White’s writings are left behind as old and irrelevant. In the process of producing a new secular model of ministerial practice, pastors and evangelists further accommodate doctrines and practices to new ideologies, or simply push them aside for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. Worship becomes central and new cultural forms become the chosen tools to call multitudes to “experience” *the gospel* through emotional excitement.

Ministerial pragmatism replaces biblical truth. Whatever works is seen as what the “Holy Spirit” wants for the church, even if this contradicts biblical

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Enlightenment over two hundred years ago—and perhaps even comparable to the earlier shifts that opened the Reformation and Renaissance” (Ibid., (203–205).

<sup>100</sup>“No feature of modern culture so dominates life and thought as does television. The medium heavily influences all by the smallest minority of people, therefore, at no time in history has there existed such a level playing field with regard to information and entertainment. Culturally, television is the great equalizer. The socially high and mighty watch the same programs as the socially low and powerless. Television is the consolation prize for being poor” (William E. Brown, “Theology in a Postmodern Culture: Implications of a Video-Dependent Society,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernity: An Evangelical Engagement*, ed. David S. Dockery [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 318).

<sup>101</sup>On the effect of computers on knowledge itself, see Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1979], 3–6). On the globalization of information, see Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 17–18.

<sup>102</sup>This pattern became ingrained in the blueprint of classical Christian theology (Jack A. Bonson, *Athens and Jerusalem: The Role of Philosophy in Theology* [New York: Paulist, 1993], 22–31). This pattern, still present in the modern synthesis of Christian theology, is methodologically attached to the multiplicity of sources of classical and modern theologies (see, for instance, David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988], 43–56). Christian theology has always adapted to the philosophy, science, and culture of the day. Thus, it is not surprising that Christians will continue to do the same when facing secularism and postmodernity.

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teachings and practice. At the beginning of the twentieth century, modernism divided denominations across the border into liberal and conservative camps. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Charismatic movement permeates all denominations, conservative and liberal, and unites them in praxis ecumenism.

In North America, Europe, and Australia the presence and writings of Evangelical and Progressive Adventists have influenced the mindset of an increasing number of Adventist leaders (pastors, teachers, administrators, and laity). They look at Adventism not from the biblical Sanctuary and the pillars of Adventism perspective, but from the hermeneutical principles (pillars) on which Christian theology (Roman Catholic and Protestant) has been built. Thus, they are prepared to further accommodate their beliefs to new changes in Charismatic and cultural thinking.<sup>103</sup> They are convinced that to reach a new secular audience, the Charismatic-entertainment model of “worship” is the solution.<sup>104</sup> Consciously or unconsciously, many are joining the Charismatic movement and brining it into the church’s self-consciousness and mission. As a result, they advocate joining the new “spiritual ecumenicity” sweeping all Christian denominations.<sup>105</sup>

For some, the goal in the practice of ministry is to have a large attendance on Sabbath.<sup>106</sup> Because in first world countries church attendance does not increase, pastors sense the irrelevance of their efforts. Following the Charismatic model of worship sweeping throughout Christianity, some pastors attribute the irrelevance of their effort, in favor of believers and unbelievers alike, to “old packaging” or forms of worship. Thus, many pastors seek to attract larger audiences by embracing culturally engaging worship rituals to the detriment of preaching the Word and engaging membership in the mission of the Church. Incorrectly, this renewal of the ritual is labeled “worship” renewal. However, rituals are only external forms unable to produce or elicit the spiritual nature of worship.

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<sup>103</sup>Steve Daily wishes Adventism to experience the “third wave of the Holy Spirit.” He considers the charismatic movement the model to follow, among other things, because it “has grown more than thirty times faster than Adventism, and has been more than one hundred times as effective at reaching young people in North America as Adventism” (*Adventism for a New Generation*, 249). See also his charismatic interpretation of the heritage and essence of Adventism (*ibid.*, 272–281).

<sup>104</sup>For many in this mind frame, Willow Creek becomes the model Adventism should follow (*ibid.*, 241–242).

<sup>105</sup>Steve Daily is explicit about this point. Explaining that the “‘Charismatic’ renewal that is impacting many mainline churches” is forming a “spiritual ecumenicity,” he tells us that his “prayer is that Adventism will be on the cutting edge of this movement, rather than occupying its usual position at the end of the tail” (*ibid.*, 313).

<sup>106</sup>Richard Rice correctly reviews some of the problems in looking at the ministry and mission of the church from the perspective of numbers (*Believing, Behaving, Belonging*, 122–126).

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Emphasis on ritual is slowly Charismatizing<sup>107</sup> Adventism and transforming it into another ritualistic version of Christianity. The so-called “worship” experience becomes the preferred tool for evangelizing the youth. Relation to God becomes associated with and mediated by “doing” the ritual. A new legalism replaces the old legalism. The old “ethical” legalistic attitude assumed one earns salvation by performing ethical actions prescribed by Scripture. The new “ritualistic” legalistic attitude assumes God confers salvation through baptism and Sabbath worship rituals.

In an overwhelming number of our Adventist churches, a new “sacrament”<sup>108</sup> mediating the presence of the Holy Spirit is popular beat or rock music. Music<sup>109</sup> then replaces the Word. Concerts replace preaching. Feeling replaces mission. Spirituality replaces obedience. Religion becomes a mechanically induced,<sup>110</sup> existentially spiritless experience in the midst of spirited shouting and external expressions of joy. As a result, Bible study and personal commitment to biblical truth is disappearing from the consciousness and imagination of Evangelicals in general<sup>111</sup> and new generations of Adventists in particular. Adventism

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<sup>107</sup>Steve Daily explicitly advocates the Charismatization of Adventism as the only way to find relevance and be authentically Christian (*Adventism for a New Generation*, 313). Lloyd Grolmund reports a high level of Charismatization of Adventism in Australia (see “Fire in the Church,” in Samuele Bacchiocchi, *End Time Issues 110* [Newsletter: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/>, 2,01, 2004]). North America and Europe are not immune to this tendency.

<sup>108</sup>According to the Catholic Church, “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Internet ed. [Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993], 1131). See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, IIIa. 60. 2–3. In a pragmatic culture and charismatic setting, music becomes the efficacious spatiotemporal sign of grace dispensed to us. The new priest is the “worship director.” Thus mediated, reception of grace and salvation does not require preaching or the understanding of Scripture. The kind of music involved is irrelevant, as long as it awakens the spirit (emotions) of the worshipers.

<sup>109</sup>We should understand divided views on rock music in church worship as the result of different hermeneutical visions and theological systems. While Samuele Bacchiocchi and other authors argue the traditional position of Adventism that rejects rock music as an option in church worship (*The Christian & Rock Music: A Study on Biblical Principles of Music* [Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 2000]), Ed Christian criticizes Bacchiocchi’s book and thinks there may in some circumstances be a place for Contemporary Christian Music in Adventist worship (“The Christian & Rock Music: A Review Essay,” *JATS* 13/1 [2002]: 150–183; expanded and much revised in the later *Joyful Noise: A Sensible Look at Christian Music* [Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2003]).

<sup>110</sup>The classical conception of the “sacraments” is at the basis of a mechanical conception of salvation advocated by Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and most sectors of American Evangelicalism. Mel Gibson’s movie “The Passion of the Christ” feeds on this unbiblical theology of salvation and is becoming a sacrament to a postmodern multimedia-saturated secular audience. See, for instance, the comments on “The Passion of the Christ” in *Way of Life Literature* (<http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/melgibson-thepassionofthechrist/melgibsons-film.html>).

<sup>111</sup>Evangelicals are profoundly divided into two main groups that Albert Moehler, Jr. names the “Doctrine [Traditional] Party” and the “Experience [Progressive] Party” (“‘Evangelical’: What’s in a Name?,” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, ed. John H. Armstrong [Chicago: Moody, 1996], 32). Many Evangelicals have problems

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is rapidly secularizing its worship rituals and Christian experience.<sup>112</sup> At the beginning of the twenty-first century, many Adventist communities are moving rapidly from a biblically to a culturally-centered worship and life style. Changes in the ground and hermeneutical pillars of the church generate shifts in her life and mission.

These trends in ministry and mission are not compatible with the coherent system of truth that the doctrine of the Sanctuary opened to the mind of Ellen White and the pioneers. How did they come about? One contributing factor may be that throughout its short life span, the basis for the praxis of Adventist communities has shifted from the one Book, to the “many books” of Ellen White, to the many sources of theology in Evangelical and Progressive Adventism, and to the many books of Evangelical writers our pastors now use as guides for their theological thinking and practical action.<sup>113</sup>

#### 5. Reaffirming

While some sectors of the church experienced large paradigmatic shifts in the hermeneutical vision—pillars—and cognitive foundation—the sources of theology—on which Adventist theology and ministry stand, most Adventists were and continue to be unaware that such changes are taking place. Yet, as in the last twenty years the Evangelical and Progressive reinterpretations of Adventism began to circulate more freely by way of publications, sermons, presentations, classes, and personal interchange, two responses challenged the wholesale reinterpretation of Adventism by reaffirming Adventist traditional beliefs. One response builds on Ellen White’s writings, the other on Scripture. Let us consider each briefly.

**Historical Adventism.** As a general designation, Historical Adventism is a label of convenience to designate a sector of Adventism that, since the early

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with the Charismatic movement. They do not agree with the notion that God speaks to the church apart from the Bible (R. Fowler White, “Does God Speak Today Apart from the Bible?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 86); with the Charismatic-propelled notion that culture rather than Scripture should rule our worship style (John F. MacArthur, Jr., “How Shall We Then Worship?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 175–187); or with contemporary Christian music and lyrics (Leonard Payton, “How Shall We Sing to God?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 189–206).

<sup>112</sup>Secularizing means defining one’s views and practices by culture (*seculus*, the world) rather than Scripture (the sacred, God); see, Millard J Erickson, *Where is Theology Going*, 102.

<sup>113</sup>In some Adventist churches in America, one can hear more quotations from C. S. Lewis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer than from Ellen White. A recent example of the trend is the use of Rick Warren’s *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) by some Biblical Adventist pastors in Sabbath School and lay training. The entire premise from which this book proceeds is the Calvinistic interpretation of foreknowledge, predestination, and providence that stands in direct contradiction to the biblical understanding of these issues. When we do not understand these issues in their biblical systematic context, implicitly we let their philosophically grounded interpretation become a hermeneutical principle that shapes the entire constellation of Christian doctrines. When pastors promote this sort of book, we should not be surprised when believers get the impression that Adventism is compatible with and supports the ideas they contain.

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eighties, reacted strongly against Ford's views on the Sanctuary doctrine.<sup>114</sup> This sector continued the widespread practice of doing theology from the writings of Ellen White that began soon after her death early in the twentieth-century.<sup>115</sup> Those familiar with Ellen White's writings could easily detect the large shifts Evangelical and Cultural Adventists were introducing into the Adventist community. Adventists who believed in Mrs. White's prophetic role saw these shifts not as mere theological nuances, but as departures from the truth entrusted to the saints. They understood that Ford's proposal was a rejection of the Sanctuary doctrine and the hermeneutical role on which Adventism stands. They did their best to counter the "new theology" infiltrating Adventist thinking.<sup>116</sup>

Though their writings undoubtedly helped many Adventists understand the issues and keep the original theological perspective alive, their efforts were limited in two ways. From the administrative perspective, their "independent ministries" strategy of organization placed them at odds with the very community they wanted to support. From the theological perspective, their arguing from Ellen White's writings put them at odds with the *sola Scriptura* principle they defend. In so doing, they created a methodological disconnect between themselves and the "new theology" against which they are reacting. To put it briefly, Historical and Evangelical Adventists speak two different languages. The former speak from Ellen White's theology and the latter speak from Scripture. By proceeding in this way, Historical Adventists maximize their influence among believers familiar with Ellen White's writings, but greatly diminish their persuasiveness with Evangelical and Cultural Adventists.

By closely following Ellen White's writings, Historical Adventism reaffirms the traditional teachings of Adventism. On the positive side, this approach keeps alive the hermeneutical vision that originated Adventism. On the negative side, Historical Adventism interprets the Sanctuary doctrine from the ontological "vision" of Christ's sinful human nature, Christ incarnated in sinful human flesh, sharing the same tendencies to sin we have. This implies that real Christians must achieve absolute perfect sinlessness before the second coming of Christ. Sinless perfection becomes the final and decisive chapter in the Great Controversy before the coming of Christ.<sup>117</sup> According to Adventist historian George Knight, most Adventists held these views until the 1957 publication of *Questions on Doctrines*.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 175.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 138–141.

<sup>116</sup>See, for instance, Russell R. Standish and Colin D. Standish, *Adventism Challenged: The Gathering Storm* (Brisbane: Hartland Institute, 1986); and *Adventism Challenged: The Storm Bursts*, vol. 2 (Brisbane: Hartland Institute, 1986).

<sup>117</sup>For a forceful and clear presentation of this way of thinking, see M. L. Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, 2nd rev. ed. (Washington: Review and Herald, 1969).

<sup>118</sup>George Knight, ed., *Questions on Doctrine Annotated Edition* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2004); see Russell R. Standish and Colin D. Standish, 43.

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Is the human nature of Christ sinful, sinless, or both? Instead of dwelling on past unfinished Adventist traditional teaching prior to the sixties or engaging in war by using quotations from Ellen White, Adventist theologians should engage in drawing their theological vision from Scripture, including all ontological issues involved, even the nature of Christ. Failure to do so has contributed in no small degree to the divisions in Adventist theology that we are briefly surveying in this article.

As noted above, Historical Adventism does not build its doctrines and theological understanding on the *sola Scriptura* principle,<sup>119</sup> even though Ellen White recommends it.<sup>120</sup> Besides, their theological strategy overlooks the theological, methodological, and intellectual issues undergirding the Evangelical and Cultural reconstructions of Adventist thought. To survive as a united theological community, Adventism must address and resolve these issues.

**Biblical Adventism.** Serious, revolutionary, and committed Bible study is the genius of Adventism. As the community grew, the center which generated ground-breaking biblical studies switched from the laity to the administration. With the creation of colleges and universities, the center of theological activity switched again from the administration to the academic community around the world, led by the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Adventist beliefs came about from solid Bible study rather than from supernatural revelations given to Ellen White. "Ellen White's visions filled the role of confirmation rather than initiation" (Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 86).

<sup>120</sup>Ellen White explicitly viewed her writings as the lesser light given to bring attention to the greater light of Scripture. "The Lord has sent his people much instruction, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light" (*Review and Herald* January 20, 1903, par. 9). Moreover, she consistently argued that we should ground our beliefs on the greater light of Scripture. "We must study to find out the best way in which to take up the review of our experiences from the beginning of our work, when we separated from the churches, and went forward step by step in the light that God gave us. We then took the position that the Bible, and the Bible only, was to be our guide; and we are never to depart from this position" (*Counsels to Writers and Editors* [Nashville: Southern, 1946], 145; emphasis provided).

<sup>121</sup>The Biblical Research Institute is a service department of the General Conference established by action of the GC Committee on Sept. 25, 1975. "The purpose and goals of the institute are to (1) identify areas in which biblical research is needed in the Seventh-day Adventist Church; (2) conduct research in the Bible and related areas; (3) communicate the results of this research to the appropriate audiences; (4) assist the GC administration on matters of biblical interpretation, doctrines, and church trends; (5) serve the world field as a resource in the areas of biblical interpretation and doctrine; (6) evaluate manuscripts referred to it by the North American unions and the overseas divisions; (7) provide educational services in biblical studies and theology for pastors, Bible teachers, administrators, and other interested workers; (8) maintain contact with SDA seminaries; (9) foster and maintain contact and good relationships with the community of SDA scholars in biblical studies, theology, and related areas; and (10) provide a forum for the presentation and discussion of papers on biblical studies. The historical roots of the institute go back to two committees that functioned for many years independent of each other: the Biblical Study and Research Committee and the Defense Literature Committee. The Biblical Study and Research Committee was appointed by the Autumn Council on Sept. 24, 1952." "The Defense Committee, established in 1943, had basi-

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Among the important contributions of this sector of Adventism to the biblical thinking of the church was the publication of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1953–1957).<sup>122</sup> As response to Ford's Evangelical reinterpretation of the Sanctuary doctrine, the Biblical Research Institute produced a series of substantial studies on related issues of biblical interpretation. At the turn of the century, a team of leading Adventist theologians led by Raoul Dederen published a biblically-grounded systematic exploration of the 27 fundamental beliefs in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*.<sup>123</sup> Other theologians making substantial contributions to Biblical Adventism in various areas of research include Edward Heppenstall,<sup>124</sup> Hans La Rondelle,<sup>125</sup> Gerhard Hasel,<sup>126</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi,<sup>127</sup> and Richard Davidson.<sup>128</sup>

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cally an apologetic function answering publications against the church" (Don F. Neufeld, *Seventh-Day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2nd rev. ed., Commentary Reference Series [Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1995], sv., Biblical Research Institute).

<sup>122</sup>Francis D. Nichol [et al.], eds., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols. (Washington: Review and Herald, c1978–80); see Knight, *A Search of Identity*, 162–163.

<sup>123</sup>Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000).

<sup>124</sup>Heppenstall has written the most comprehensive systematic study on the High Priestly ministry of Jesus Christ in *Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1972). He also wrote *Salvation Unlimited: Perspectives in Righteousness by Faith* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1974), and, *The Man Who is God: A Study of the Person and Nature of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1977).

<sup>125</sup>*Christ our Salvation: What God Does For Us and In Us* (Mountain View: Pacific, 1980); *Deliverance in the Psalms* (Berrien Springs: First Impressions, 1983); *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota: First Impressions, c1997); and *Assurance of Salvation* (Nampa: Pacific, c1999).

<sup>126</sup>*Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1985); and *Speaking in Tongues: Biblical Speaking in Tongues and Contemporary Glossolalia* (Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1991).

<sup>127</sup>*Rest for Modern Man: The Sabbath for Today* (Nashville: Southern, 1976); *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian UP, 1980); *The Sabbath in the New Testament: Answers to Questions* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1985); *The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1985); *The Advent Hope for Human Hopelessness: A Theological Study of the Meaning of the Second Advent for Today* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1986); *Hal Lindsey's Prophetic Jigsaw Puzzle: Five Predictions that Failed!* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1987); *Wine in the Bible: A Biblical Study on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1989); *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1991); *Christian Dress & Adornment: Biblical Perspectives* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1995); *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian UP, 1995); *God's Festivals: In Scripture and History* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1995); *Immortality or Resurrection? A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1997); and *Sabbath under Crossfire* (Berrien Springs: Biblical Perspectives, 1998).



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When Evangelical Adventism rejected the Sanctuary doctrine in the early eighties, Biblical Adventists reaffirmed it with solid biblical scholarship.<sup>129</sup> Thus, in spite of the shifts taking place in the Adventist community, *sola Scriptura* remains the implicit and official ground on which Adventists should build their theology and teachings. Yet, in spite of these all-important affirmations, Biblical Adventism has neglected the macro hermeneutical role the doctrine of the Sanctuary plays in Adventist theology.

Scholarly reaffirmation of the Sanctuary doctrine has not persuaded Evangelical or Progressive Adventists. This fact reveals the depth of the theological divisions in Adventist thinking. They reach the very foundations of theological thinking and method. They divide us at the level of (1) the *sola Scriptura* cognitive ground of theology and (2) the hermeneutical vision from which we should strive to understand all theological issues. As a result, incompatible theologies and practices coexist in the Church.

### 6. Conclusion

Our brief overview of the early Adventist vision that generated the Adventist community and opened to its sight a complete yet unfinished system of biblical truth, connected and harmonious, has revealed that with the passing of time the Church has neglected it. Moreover, large sectors of Adventist leadership and laity are convinced that the Adventist vision was wrong and have replaced it with visions borrowed from other Christian theologies. As a result, at the beginning of the twentieth-first century, Adventism is administratively united but theologically divided. As we have briefly pointed out in this article, the divisions reach the very foundations of theological thinking. In spite of historical and biblical reaffirmations, forgetting is still dividing Adventism today; forgetting the *sola Scriptura* principle, forgetting the pillars, and forgetting the complete system of truth, perfect and harmonious, the pillars bring to view. Forgetfulness is not only making inroads in the scholarly community but also in the pastoral and lay communities as well.

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<sup>128</sup> *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical topos Structures* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1981); and *A Love Song for the Sabbath* (Washington: Review and Herald, c1988).

<sup>129</sup> Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 176. Arnold V. Wallenkampf; and Richard Leshner, eds., *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1981); William H. Shea, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation* (Washington: General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, c1982); Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, c. 1986); Frank Holbrook, ed., *The Seventy Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1986); Frank Holbrook, ed., *Issues in the Book of Hebrews* (Silver Springs: Biblical Research Institute, c. 1989); Frank Holbrook, ed., *Doctrine of the Sanctuary: A Historical Survey (1845–1863)* (Silver Springs: Biblical Research Institute, c. 1989); Frank Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Revelation* (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 1992); Frank Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Revelation*, 2 vols (Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, 1992).

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These developments are not encouraging. Diversity<sup>130</sup> has become pluralism<sup>131</sup> in the ground level of divine revelation and in the hermeneutical level of the vision from which the theological thinking of the church and its praxis is generated.

We can overcome the division that exists at the level of hermeneutical vision *if* we work from the *sola Scriptura* principle. Theological concerns and contributions of Evangelical Adventists are not only not contradictory with but also included in the complete system of theology the Sanctuary doctrine and the pillars of Adventism open to view.

Yet, if we persist in replacing the *sola Scriptura* principle with the multiple sources of theology matrix borrowed from Christian theology, we will not be able to overcome our hermeneutical, theological, and practical divisions. The Adventist vision and system of theology our pioneers discovered in Scripture is incompatible with visions and theologies derived from scientific and philosophical wisdom. Thus, embracing what we broadly know as “Progressive Adventism” implies a radical change in the ground, hermeneutical vision, theological system, and practice of ministry of what we today still know as Adventism. Biblical Adventism and Progressive Adventism are two complete theological systems that are incompatible with each other. Rationality requires that we choose between them. The differences between Evangelical and Progressive Adventism, on one side, and, the complete system of theology that the Sanctuary doctrine opens to view, on the other side, reach the very ground from which the thinking and praxis of the community flow. Due to this fact, the church will be forced to choose between them. They cannot coexist in a united church. Can a house divided against itself stand (Mark 3:25)?

What should we do? Consistent with their way of thinking, Evangelical and Progressive Adventists suggest unity in love, not in theological thinking. They

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<sup>130</sup>Diversity “implies that there is a common basis (Scripture) on which different opinions can be approached and resolved. If there is one foundation, the Bible, then from this one commonly accepted basis will come growth in knowledge, spiritual growth, and growth in the understanding of God’s nature. If we imagine Scripture as the tree of our knowledge on which these grow, we will easily understand that some fruits will not occur on a tree that has this foundation. The various fruits may be at different stages of growth. Not all will have the same color. As the apostle Paul wrote: there is ‘one Lord, one Faith, one baptism’ (Eph 4:5 NIV). On the basis of this **one** faith there will be unity—not pluralism. But different opinions can be tackled and resolved because the Bible is the norm for our faith” (“Living With Confidence Despite Some Open Questions: Upholding the Biblical Truth of Creation Amidst Theological Pluralism,” *JATS* 14/1 (2003): 246.

<sup>131</sup>Frank Hasel correctly explains that “pluralism” “expresses the idea that there are conflicting truth-claims that stand in competition with each other because there is no common basis, foundation, or starting point. There are different sources of knowledge, such as experience, reason, philosophy, naturalistic science, and Scripture. Imagine each of these sources as a tree, each bearing its own characteristic fruit. These trees stand apart from each other, each claiming to have greater importance than the others. If there is pluralism there still be no unity. Instead of unity we have conflicting truth claims and viewpoints within the church that lead to fragmentation, ambiguity, and doubt” (Ibid.).

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argue that loving acceptance of theological pluralism is good for the Church. However, since they are conscious that their theological understanding implies large paradigm shifts the worldwide church may not be willing to accept, maintaining the status quo seems to work well for the advancement of their theological views.

Yet, we should not confuse theological pluralism at the ground level of the source of theology, hermeneutical vision, and their impact in the overall teaching ministry of the global church with diversity at the personal level of understanding and experiencing our life in Christ. The cause of theological pluralism is intellectual in nature and reaches the very foundations of our theology, identity, unity, and mission. Since a house divided against itself cannot stand, we need to overcome theologically the present state of theological pluralism in Adventism.

We should go beyond reaffirming the *sola Scriptura* principle, the Sanctuary doctrine, and the pillars of Adventism. We must use them as a hermeneutical vision from which to discover for ourselves the complete system of theology and truth our pioneers discovered in Scripture. We should use the Adventist vision to advance the unfinished task of Adventist theology in the twentieth-first century. We need more than a few disconnected doctrines: we need the full understanding of their interconnected meanings and the difference they make in understanding everyday life. We need also to understand the theological revolution that this approach implies when compared with the classical, Protestant and modern approaches to Christian theology.

Can we achieve these goals in an intellectually sound way? Can we defend the “Great Controversy” approach to Christian theology at the scholarly level of university research? Is it possible to continue working on the theological project the pioneers left unfinished and many Adventists forgot along the way? Would such a theological project help the Adventist community to overcome pluralism and foster unity and mission? The second part of this series will explore these questions.

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